# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Love”**

**John 3:16-17**

**December 13, 2020**

How does God look at our world? God sees it as it really is. He sees the hurt in people’s lives due to broken relationships and unfulfilled expectations; he sees the misery we are going through because of illness and the effects of COVID-19; he sees the wreckage of drug and alcohol abuse in our vain attempts to deal with our pain; he sees murder, violence, hatred, bitterness and anger; he sees greed and injustice, famine and death, war and fears of every kind.

But God sees more. He sees that all this agony of life is a direct result of our sin, of our unwillingness to live his way and instead chose our way. Instead of humility we choose pride; rather than forgive we seek revenge; we don’t love the Lord our God or our neighbor with all our heart – our first love is for ourselves.

What, then, is God’s response to what he sees? What is his reaction to the reality that what we are is the cause of the misery we experience? I invite you to turn with me to John 3:16-17

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

God’s reaction to what he sees when he looks at our world is compassion. God is moved with love for the world in our sad and sorry state. God, seeing our agony, chose to do something to relieve it. He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will have a new life. Eternal life is not so much about the quantity of life as it is about a new quality of life. A life in which the love, compassion, mercy and grace of God is with us in our suffering in this world, and in which the power of God guarantees that in the new world, which we call heaven, there will be no more tears, no more pain. For this purpose, Jesus came into the world, and it is this purpose of God’s love for the world that we celebrate during the season of Advent as we prepare to receive Jesus at Christmas.

But it was not easy to bring about this new life. It took pain, thirst, blood and death. It took terrible darkness, awful separation and unspeakable shame. For “he who knew no sin was made sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21) upon the cross. “Amazing love! How can it be; that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” The Son took our place. But it did the job. It made a way out of this world as it is. It gave us a second chance at life.

If you are here this morning or watching via livestream and you have not yet taken advantage of this second chance at life, these verses are an invitation to you to believe. All you need to do is to say honestly and humbly to God, “I believe you love me and that you gave your Son for the forgiveness of my sin. I receive him as my Savior, and I believe that you have given me eternal life.” Accept God’s love for you and enter into a new kind of life.

For those who have already taken this step, I’d like to invite you to think about the love of God for the world. He saw the sin of the world and the destruction it causes and, instead of condemning the world, he chose, out of love, to give the world a second chance. What about you and me? Are we willing to give the people of the world a second chance?

When the Jews of John’s day heard that God loved the world, it wouldn’t be what they wanted to hear. The world was the Romans who were oppressing them. The world was the people who mocked them and hated them and took advantage of them. Love was not the first thing that a Jew would think about when he or she thought about the world.

We have various attitudes toward the world. Some us of protect ourselves from the world. Some of us consider the world a lost cause. Some of us try to fix the world. Some of us are basically okay with the world, trying to enjoy it as best we can. But what does it look like to love the world? How might I complete this sentence: “For Steve so loved the world that he . . .?” How might you complete it for yourself?

Several years ago, I read a story in Reader’s Digest about a young man who had quarreled with his father and left home. He continued to keep in touch with his mother, and wanted very badly to come home for Christmas, but he was afraid his father would not allow him. His mother wrote to him and urged him to come home, but he did not feel he could until he knew his father had forgiven him. His mother wrote and said she would talk with the father, and if he had forgiven him, she would tie a white rag on a tree which grew right alongside the railroad tracks near their home, which he could see before the train reached the station. If there was no white rag, it would be better if he went on.

So the young man started home. As the train drew near his home, he was so nervous he asked his friend who was travelling with him to sit by the window and look for the tree, which he described to him. “Tell me whether a white rag is tied to it or not.” After a bit the friend said, “I see the tree.” The son asked, “Is there a white rag tied to it?” His friend looked at him and said, “There is a white rag tied to every limb of the tree!”

That, in a sense, is what God is saying in John 3:16-17. Having loved us and sent his Son into the world to save us, he stands ready to forgive us. All we need to do is accept his forgiveness and receive his eternal life.